



Co. A, 2nd Battalion, 12th Cavalry Regiment Soldiers put pressure on insurgents.

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Battery B, 2nd Battalion, 82nd Field Artillery Regiment protects 39th Brigade Combat Team.

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Cav Country

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"Telling the First Team's Story"

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First Team Aviation Unit Honored by Army

CAMPLIBERTY, Baghdad - The Department of the Army has announced the winners of the Lt. Gen. Ellis D. Parker Award. The 2nd Battalion, 227th Aviation Regiment "Lobos" of the 4th Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division was selected as the 'Unit of the Year' for 2004 in the Combat Support category.

The announcement was made in Washington, D.C. Jan. 9.

Led by Lt. Col. William Mooney and Command Sgt. Major Francisco Melo, the Lobos deployed to Iraq in March 2004 with more than 300 Soldiers and officers. Flying more than 12,000 flight hours, they conducted numerous air assaults and transported thousands of troops and supplies throughout Iraq in support of Task Force Baghdad and multinational forces.

The battalion also assisted the transition of sovereignty in Iraq by transporting senior interim Iraqi government officials. Throughout all of these operations, the battalion has maintained an outstanding safety record by conducting aggressive risk management.

The Parker Award will be presented to Capt. Patrick Hemmer, the battalion's rear detachment commander, in Ft. Rucker, Ala. Jan. 22 at the Army Aviation Senior Leaders' Conference.

This is the second time the Army has recognized 2-227 for excellence in the past year. In June 2004, the Department of the Army presented the 2004 Deployment Excellence Award to 2-227. The Lobos are expected to return to Ft. Hood this spring.



By Cpl. Benjamin Cossel, 122nd MPAD

Area reconnaissance was just of the many missions Black Hawks from 2nd Battalion 227th Aviation Regiment, 4th BCT were responsible for.

2-12 Cav. Soldiers Detain IED Maker Cell in Northern Babil

By Spc. Andy Miller
122nd MPAD

LATIFIYAH, Iraq -- Continuing operations in the Latifiyah area of north Babil, the 3rd Platoon 'Roughriders' of Company A, Task Force 2nd Battalion, 12th Cavalry Regiment conducted a search in a farming village Jan. 16 and came up with the detainment of an improvised explosive device (IED) manufacturing cell.

The find contributes to Task Force 2-12 Cav's four-week streak of finding weapons caches and detaining anti-Iraqi forces in this previously unpatrolled area along the Euphrates River. So far the Roughriders platoon has contributed to the streak by finding over nine significant weapons caches and detaining dozens of suspects during continuous operations in the area that started when the Task Force arrived late December.

"We've been going and hitting different locations with the intent of just looking around and seeing if we uncover anything," Sgt. 1st Class Freddie Bonetti, a Roughriders squad leader from Brady, Texas, said. "We keep [the insurgents] guessing about what we're going to do next. We don't know if we're going to get a hit when we go out, but it's always a possibility.

"Sometimes we'll get lucky and where



By Spc. Andy Miller, 122nd MPAD

Sgt. 1st Class, Jerry Fallin, the Roughriders platoon sergeant from Harrah, Okla., looks on as Staff Sgt. Robert Hord (right), a Roughriders squad leader, inspects a suspicious looking AK-47 assault rifle during a cordon and search in the Latifiyah area of north Babil Jan. 16.

we don't think there's anything, wham, suddenly we come right on top of something," Bonetti added.

Taking down a cell of IED makers might have been a lucky find, but the Roughriders used their infantry skills to make it happen. They rolled up in Bradley Fighting Vehicles under the cover of darkness, and taking the neighborhood by surprise, sealed it from escape. Being infantry, they're always prepared for any-

thing, Sgt. Steven Mabry, a Roughriders team leader explained.

"We don't know what to expect going into each house," Mabry said. "Each house is a different [obstacle]. Most of them are built the same, but as you go in you don't know whose hiding where."

Going into the house where the IED makers were located, Mabry and his team noticed something strange.

"I could tell by the two guys that were

standing outside. They didn't seem right," Mabry said. "You could tell by just looking at them when we first came in.

"Most of the time they already know the routine. We walk in and all the males will come out. They didn't really seem like they wanted to do the routine, so we made sure that we kept those [men] separated," Mabry added. "There was something fishy about them."

The team's next tip came when an elderly man in the village pointed the men out as bad guys. The Roughriders don't see that kind of thing every day, Bonetti said.

"[There was an] old man pointing and screaming 'ali babba'. That usually doesn't happen, especially if these are big league bad guys," Bonetti said. "For an old man to do that, it shows a lot of courage."

When the names of these men were checked against a list of known anti-Iraqi forces by an interpreter, a close match was found. With the help of their interpreter, the Roughriders made a positive identification of the men, and took another IED maker off the streets of Iraq.

"My platoon has been very good at following up on leads with the interpreter," 1st Lt. Ramiro Roldan, the Roughriders platoon leader from San Antonio, Texas, said. "They've been very successful. Usually every time they get somebody it's one of the bad guys."

Post Election Focus: the Long Road Home

Tomorrow isn't a holiday, but for football fanatics across the American countryside, and even the casual fan, Super Bowl Sunday is the culmination of a year's hard work by two teams. One team will be celebrated ... remembered through the ages: the victor.

The loser? Well, answer me this question? Who lost the Super Bowl in 1997?

As I write this column, there are still four teams alive in the NFL playoffs, and the Iraqi national elections are still more than a week away. But as you read this, election weekend has passed.

Our "Super Bowl" here in Iraq was actually election weekend here in Iraq. The election was the culmination of a year's hard work for our team, the First Team.

It doesn't matter who actually "wins" the election, though. The real victory is bringing the vote to the Iraqi people.

We didn't win for ourselves. We won a victory for the Iraqi people. All of our energy, all of our efforts, all of our sacrifices took us to that one day, when Iraqis determined their own future. We gave them democracy. We gave them freedom of choice. And we gave them our

lives to do it.

Tomorrow, Feb. 6, most of America will be glued to the largest sports event of the year. Last weekend, you were part of the largest news event of the year. The Soldier, Marines and airmen of Task Force Baghdad were an integral part of history in the making. I applaud each and every one of more than 35,000 troops who make up this task force.

For the past year, you have conducted and supported complex operations superbly. With elections behind us, our focus can shift and our sights can move to the last hurdle we face in this deployment: the road home.

We are now faced with another complex operation: redeployment, refit and reintegration.

Historically, the road home and homecomings have proven to be very high risk and challenging periods for Soldiers. Possibly the biggest challenge will be integration to our home station, our training mission, our families and our community.

I want to share some alarming facts experienced by our fellow Soldiers who have already redeployed from this theater.

Two-hundred and sixty-four Soldiers lost their lives in accidents in fiscal year 2004. Of those, 174 occurred outside of this theater.

In the first 21 days of this fiscal year, the Army suffered nine

Pegasus 6 Sends

MG Peter Chiarelli

Commanding General



fatalities in privately-owned vehicle accidents. Eight of those Soldiers had recently redeployed from Operation Iraqi Freedom.

More Soldiers die in POV accidents every year than were killed in OIF. You've survived a year in a combat environment; now we want you and your family members to survive travel on our nation's highways.

Four simple things to remember, upon our return home, will assist you in not becoming the next sad statistic.

Seat Belts

On base, or off, seat belts are not an optional safety device anymore. Army standards require their use, but more important than that, seat belts have been proven to be the number one preventative measure that saves lives in crashes. It's the law, but it's just common sense to use them.

Alcohol and Accidents

Many Soldiers want to "cut loose" upon their return to home station. Let the party begin, they'll say. But think before you drink, and use public transportation, taxis or the best alternative, a designated driver when you go

out to clubs or social settings where alcohol is the main event.

Travel Planning

We'll all be taking advantage of block leave opportunities shortly after returning home. Many of you will travel great distances by automobile under sometimes uncertain weather conditions to be with loved ones. I urge you to take your time, and get to where you're going safely. Leaders should check out trip plans of their Soldiers, and conduct pre-trip safety inspections on vehicles. We would do this on any mission here in Iraq. It is just as important back home.

Defensive Driving

Many of our troops spent the past 12 months on the "offensive" when it came to driving through the streets of Baghdad. We need to all refocus ourselves on defensive driving skills and measures we can all take to avoid accidents.

If this sounds like a safety briefing, well, it is. All of you have performed magnificently over the past year, showing dedication, professionalism and attention to detail that allowed us to accomplish our mission in Iraq.

Now, I want safety to be the number one concern of every Soldier and every leader in the division. Losing even one of you after completing this historic mission would be a tragedy.

Play it safe. Make it home.

FIRST TEAM!



By Spc. Joshua McPhie, 1st Cav. Div. Public Affairs (Rear)

Members of the 1st Cavalry Division's Horse Cavalry Detachment stand in formation during a brief welcoming ceremony on the division's parade field at Fort Hood, Texas Jan. 5. More than two dozen troopers returned following a year-long deployment Baghdad.

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Spur to The Moment

Photos by Spc. Andy Miller, 122nd MPAD

"We've contributed communications support for the Task Force. High speed data network, SIPR and NIPR."



Staff Sgt. Corey Thomas
B Co, 13th Sig. Bn.
2-12 Cav., 1st Cav. Div.

"We helped the Iraqi people in freeing them and helping to put them in a state of democracy."



Sgt. Edward Martinez
A Co, 2-12 Cav.
1st Cav. Div.

What have you contributed to the 1st Cav.'s mission in Iraq over the past year?

"We received family care packages and distributed them to the Iraqi nationals."



Staff Sgt. Charles Davis
3-82 Field Artillery,
2-12 Cav., 1st Cav. Div.

"We've maintained 2-12 Cav's combat power at 95 percent for most of the year. We've kept the tanks outside the wire fighting for us, to keep us safe inside the FOB."



Staff Sgt. John Van Avery
B Co., 2-12 Cav.,
1st Cav. Div.

"We've been everywhere. We've been to Bonzai and Cooke on 6-week cycles. Now I'm at Dogwood. We support our people wherever they go."



Spc. Rita Martinez
B Co., 15th FSB
2-12 Cav., 1st Cav. Div.

"During a couple of months, I've done some medical work. I've saved some lives. I've just done my job."



Pvt. Blake Spencer
HHC, 2-12 Cav.,
1st Cav. Div.

Expect Changes Upon Return Home

By Spc. Andy Miller
122nd MPAD

CAMP LIBERTY, Baghdad -- When the Soldiers of the 1st Cavalry Division return to Fort Hood from Baghdad this spring, they can expect to redeploy against the backdrop of the largest and most significant military transformation since the beginning of the Cold War.

The plan to restructure the Army's organization into units of action has already begun. Plans are in the works to stand up another brigade combat team/unit of action (UA) by 2006. Soldiers will changes throughout the Army, according to retired Vice Adm. Arthur Cebrowski, chief of the Department of Defense's Office of Force Transformation.

"[Our service members] have the opportunity to not only see change take place in front of their eyes, but to actually make it happen," Cebrowski told American Forces Press Service last year.

For the First Team's transformation, most of the major changes will occur beginning in 2005, with the division scheduled to transform into a unit of employment (UE). The entirely new fourth maneuver brigade unit of action (UA) is scheduled to stand up at Fort Bliss by the end of the fiscal year.

A UE is a modular command element at the division or corps level, where the UA is the subordinate brigade-level fighting unit, similar to the brigade combat teams the division organized for military operations in Baghdad.

According to Capt. Jaime Calica, a 1st Cav. Div. operations officer, the upcoming transformation means some First Team Soldiers can expect changes to affect them as soon as they get home.

Some will get assigned to a new UA, and will have a new chain of command and duty station. As part of the reconfiguration, division-level support assets that don't traditionally fall under the command of a maneuver brigade, like field artillery, military intelligence, air defense and engineers, will be absorbed into the units of action.

For the most part, however, the individual Soldier's occupation specialty, training and day-to-day role in the organization will not change significantly, Calica noted.

One thing the transformation will affect, according to Sgt. Maj. Merle Henry, the 1st Cav. Div. com-

mand career counselor, is the individual Soldier's level of control and involvement over his or her career.

With transformation, some units of action will get a lifecycle or 'E-Date'. An 'E-Date' is the day the unit of action's 36-month lifecycle officially begins.

Soldiers assigned to a lifecycle unit of action can expect to remain there for the duration of the lifecycle. This gives the individual Soldier who enlists or reenlists into a lifecycle unit of action more control over their future, Henry said. Just reenlisting to stay with the division will give the Soldier some idea about the future, Henry noted.

"Soldiers know, in a sense, what their future holds," Henry said of reenlisting with the division. "[When] they go back, they're going back to Fort Hood. If a Soldier reenlists for something else ... volunteers for other things, there are some unknowns there. They could go to another unit and get deployed, or come down on orders."

Soldiers who don't have enough time left in service to stay with a unit of action throughout its lifecycle will not be eligible to serve in a lifecycle unit of action. Because of this, there may have be some misunderstandings amongst some Soldiers. Henry heard rumors where Soldiers were told that if they didn't reenlist, they would get reassigned to a deploying unit.

"It was just a perception or a misinterpretation of the message," Henry said. "Nobody is going to be intentionally moved, who doesn't want to reenlist, to a unit that's going to get stop-lossed, or going to get deployed (again)."

With the entire Army undergoing major transformation, the 1st Cav. Div. is coming home to a new atmosphere, Henry said. There will be a lot of changes, and there will be rumors. If anyone has any questions about how the changes will affect their career, or reenlistment options, Henry urges them to see their career counselor.

"[Soldiers] need to seek their career counselors," Henry said. "That way they can get firsthand information and it will help dispel rumors and gossip."

While the division's career counselors have the most up-to-date information on bonuses and reenlistment options, Henry said most of the information is also available on the Internet under Army Knowledge Online or the Army website.



U.S. Army Photo

Two buildings south of the Iraqi town of Mahmuhiyah are demolished by explosive charges as part of "Operation Triple Play" Jan. 19. The buildings were reportedly used by insurgents to intimidate, torture and kill residents in the north Babil region. Task Force Baghdad Soldiers and Marines have been operating in this rural region south of the Iraqi capital, working to deny insurgents their former base of operations.

1st Cav. Troops Destroy Buildings Used to Torture Iraqis in North Babil

BAGHDAD -- Task Force Baghdad Soldiers destroyed two buildings in the north Babil region south of the Iraqi capital, reputed to have been used by insurgents to intimidate, torture and kill members of the local populace.

"These buildings were known 'slaughter houses,'" said Lt. Col. James Hutton,

spokesman for the 1st Cavalry Division and Task Force Baghdad.

Hutton said the site of the buildings, south of the town of Mahmuhiyah, was formerly a military communications facility under Saddam

Hussein's regime.

"This operation demonstrates to the local populace that we are committed to freeing them from the grasp of fear," Hutton said.

"The insurgent feeds off of the fear of others. But the insurgent knows his options are running out."

Iraqi Police Colonel Rescued by Cavalry Unit

By Spc. Erik LeDrew
122nd MPAD

BAGHDAD -- The Soldiers of Headquarters Company, 1st Battalion, 9th Cavalry Regiment, rescued an Iraqi

police colonel and his wife Jan. 8 after anti-Iraqi insurgents attacked the two on Baghdad's notorious Haifa Street.

The colonel and his wife had returned to their recently-vacated apartment on Haifa

Street that evening to fetch a few remaining commodities when two Iraqi police (IP) officers, serving as the colonel's personal bodyguards, were attacked and killed outside the building.

According to the colonel, there were two vehicles carrying up to 14 insurgents. Six insurgents were seen entering the building after killing the two IP officers, but when the 1-9 Cavalry troops arrived at the scene 30 minutes later, the insurgents had already left the building.

Two suspicious individuals were detained outside the apartment building for further questioning. Both individuals were carrying the exact same ID card and one was in possession of a pistol.

After they cleared the apartment building and its two adjacent buildings, the Soldiers escorted the IP colonel and his wife in Bradley Fighting Vehicles to the nearest IP station.

Neither the colonel nor his wife was harmed in the incident.



By Spc. Erik LeDrew, 122nd MPAD

A Soldier with Headquarters Company, 1st Battalion, 9th Cavalry Regiment stands guard at an open doorway Jan. 8 on Haifa Street in central Baghdad, while his platoon clears the rest of the stairwell in an apartment building. The unit responded to an attack on an Iraqi police colonel and his wife, which killed the colonel's two body guards.

Operation Triple Play: Soldiers Secure Salman Pak

By Spc. Jan Critchfield
122nd MPAD

SALMAN PAK, Iraq -- To improve security for the upcoming elections in Iraq, Task Force Baghdad troops executed "Operation Triple Play" Dec. 31 in order to hinder the ability of insurgent groups to plan and resource large operations. Large scale cordon and search operations in two other cities, in addition to Salman Pak, were conducted with great success by Iraqi National Guardsmen, and U.S. Soldiers and Marines.

When the people of Salman Pak, a small town 12 miles south of Baghdad, rose the morning of Dec. 31, they found themselves in the midst of hundreds of Task Force Baghdad Soldiers and Iraqi National Guardsmen on the prowl for illegal weapons and wanted insurgents.

"Elements of the 1st Cavalry Division's 1st Brigade Combat Team, including 2nd Battalion, 5th Cavalry Regiment; 2nd Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment; and 1st Battalion, 82nd Field Artillery Regiment, set up checkpoints and conducted precision searches of a multitude of previously designated targets that resulted in the capture of several known



By Spc. Jan Critchfield, 122nd MPAD

Soldiers of Task Force Baghdad post signs Dec. 31 warning residents of a temporary checkpoint set for "Operation Triple Play" in Salman Pak, Iraq.

terrorists," said Capt. Brian O'Malley, the 1st Brigade Combat Team's Public Affairs Officer.

O'Malley added that Iraqi National Guard troops also conducted raids and manned checkpoints alongside U.S. Soldiers throughout the operation.

By the end of the operation in Salman Pak, which lasted two days, several terrorist and

insurgent targets had been captured and a large weapons cache that included rocket-propelled grenade rounds, RPG launchers, mortar rounds, AK-47 rifles, hand grenades, bomb-making materials, and body armor, had been recovered.

"The raids were part of a larger effort to prevent any forces that would be interested in influencing the upcoming

elections from being able to do so by taking their weapons and taking out some of their leaders, preventing them from being able to organize in time to keep people from voting," O'Malley said.

In order to prevent the escape of those targeted by the raids, no one was allowed to leave town unless it was a medical emergency. This tactic

upset many, who had business to conduct or family in Baghdad and other places, said one Salman Pak man through an interpreter.

"Since [multinational forces] have come two days ago, the people have been hurt," the man said. "Why? Because the road is cut ... and they are afraid. There may be fighting and shooting, and we are suffering from the terrorists."

"The cordon was necessary," O'Malley said, "to keep targets from fleeing and to keep innocent people from becoming involved."

Terrorists had been extorting money from the town long before the operation by inflating prices at the local gas station to fund their operations, O'Malley said.

"Those people are the worst people in our society. I am afraid about my children, my family, [and] my occupation," he said. "When American Forces wave to us and say hello to us, we are happy to see them in our town to protect us."

"We were afraid before [multinational forces] got here," the man said. "We thought [they] were going to be the same thing as in Fallujah. We do not want to be like Fallujah. We are peaceful people."

Iraqi Army's 306th Battalion Takes Over a Portion of Sadr City

By Spc. Jan Critchfield
122nd MPAD

BAGHDAD -- The Iraqi Army's 306th Battalion, 40th Brigade, an element of the 1st Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, assumed responsibility for security operations in a portion of the Sadr City area.

Lt. Col. Gary Volesky, commander of 2nd Battalion, 5th Cavalry Regiment "Lancers", passed symbolic colors to 306th commander Lt. Col. Hussein Musin Bahar Al-Freejy, an eastern Baghdad native, in a Jan. 18 ceremony.

Sadr City, an area of intermittent unrest since the Lancers arrived in Iraq almost a year ago, is home to an estimated 2.5 million people.

Several areas throughout the country have been transferred to Iraqi Security Forces in the last few months, moving toward the ultimate multinational force goal of an autonomous Iraqi Security Force and Iraqi government.

The transfer, Hussein said, was very timely.

"The transfer is very important,



By Spc. Jan Critchfield, 122nd MPAD

Commander of the 306th Iraqi Army Battalion, Col. Hussein Musin Bahar Al-Freejy, distributes frozen chicken at a school in Sadr City. The 306th assumed responsibility for security operations in a Sadr City neighborhood following a Jan. 18 ceremony.

especially for the elections," Hussein said through an interpreter. "There is a great need for the people to know that

the U.S. is transferring authority to the Iraqi Army."

Security operations are nothing

new to the soldiers of the 306th. The unit has been working in the Sadr City area with 2-5 Cavalry on raids, patrols, and checkpoints, aiding in the capture of numerous terrorists, insurgents, and weapons caches.

"My men have gained a lot of experience. Our friends the Americans have given us a lot of training. I'm positive my men are ready," Hussein said. "The elections will be a test. We are determined to pass this crisis successfully."

The 306th are taking the first step of the goal for the Iraqi Army to secure all of Iraq, Volesky said in a speech during the ceremony.

"This was one of many tasks we were charged with when we arrived: getting Iraqis out front, in charge of their country," Volesky said. "We see another example of this becoming a reality today. Hussein and his Soldiers have worked extremely hard to get to where they are today. I am confident the 306th will continue to assume a greater role in the security of all of Sadr City. We look forward to the day when we turn all of the responsibility for security of Iraq to the Iraqi Security Forces."

Annihilators Keep Pressure on Insurgents

By Spc. Andy Miller
122nd MPAD

LATIFIYAH, Iraq -- The Company A 'Annihilators' of Task Force 2nd Battalion, 12th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division, have added to their record of finding weapons caches and arresting anti-Iraqi terrorists with every operation they've conducted since moving to the Latifiyah area of North Babil three weeks ago.

The infantry company, attached to Task Force 2-12 Cav. from 1st Battalion, 5th Cavalry Regiment, has arrested over 25 high-level anti-Iraqi insurgents, and has found 13 major weapons caches while conducting offensive operations in this previously un-patrolled area along the Euphrates River. Their efforts have already had a major impact, according to Capt. Korey Brown, the Annihilators company commander.

"Our purpose down here is to try to disrupt the anti-coalition forces from hindering the elections in Baghdad," Brown said. "So by applying pressure to them down here it makes [the enemy] fight in two different directions. They not only have to focus on their plans to disrupt the elections, but now they're focused on what we're doing down here as well."

"We've disrupted numerous terrorist cells, and have found all

kinds of weapons caches and things that they may have used during the elections," he continued. "We've taken a lot of ordnance and a lot of terrorist activity out of this sector."

Staff Sgt. William Boyle Jr., a squad leader with Annihilator's 2nd Platoon, recounted an incident where his medic, Sgt. Christopher Wells, found a large cache of explosives during a Jan. 7 operation. Wells, from Austin, Texas, said he does pretty much everything the infantry does in addition to caring for the sick and wounded.

During the operation, the Annihilators were using metal detectors to search for ordnance in areas of suspected anti-Iraqi activity along the Euphrates River. Wells grabbed a metal detector and joined in on the search. He found a cache that amounted to over 1200 pounds of homemade explosives.

"To come across a big find like that, it just felt good to go out there and get that stuff off the streets and out of their hands," Wells said. "That was a big pile of stuff."

"If we hadn't found that stuff, they could have put it in their car, or made an [improvised explosive device]," he continued.

Boyle added that it was the loudest explosion he's ever heard when an explosive ordnance disposal team destroyed the cache with a controlled detonation.



By Spc. Andy Miller, 122nd MPAD

Infantry Soldiers from Company A 'Annihilators', Task Force 2-12 Cav, march through palm groves on the way back to their Bradley Fighting Vehicles after conducting an offensive against a suspected terrorist network in the Latifiyah area of North Babil along the Euphrates River Jan. 13. The infantry marched over two kilometers in the early morning hours, taking their enemy by surprise.

Finding weapons caches and detaining high-level targets is what keeps the Annihilators going, according to Boyle. Their success in North Babil carries over from the success they've had dealing with anti-Iraqi forces in Abu Ghraib and other areas of Iraq, he said.

"I think the thing is with this company, when we were in Abu Ghraib we hit that place real hard,

and we got a lot of bad guys. We got here, we hit this place hard, and we got a lot of bad guys again. So we're kind of used to success. We've been really good at [finding caches and detaining insurgents]," Boyle said.

During their most recent offensive, the Annihilators targeted several key members of a suspected terrorist cell Jan. 13. They marched

over two kilometers in the early morning darkness to take their target by surprise, and went home at the end of the operation with 34 identified targets to add to the Task Force's tally.

Brown said the Annihilators plan to remain on the offensive in this area until they return to Fort Hood, Texas, sometime after the Iraqi free elections later this month.

Unearthed Munitions End with Big Bang in Latifiyah

By Spc. Andy Miller
122nd MPAD

LATIFIYAH, Iraq -- Task Force 2nd Battalion, 12th Cavalry Regiment, Soldiers moved in on an anti-Iraqi insurgent in the Latifiyah area of north Babil Jan. 18. They detained their target without a hitch.

The operation ended with more than just the successful apprehension of a suspect however.

Working off a tip gathered while on site, Task Force 2-12 Cav Soldiers working with their attached Estonian light infantry platoon, 'Stone', found five weapons caches with a total roundup of more than two tons of raw explosives, dozens of artillery and mortar rounds, and an assortment of grenades, anti-personnel mines, armor-piercing ammunition and launchers.

Sgt. Samuel Jones, a Task Force signal systems support specialist who works as a radio operator with the Stone Platoon, recalled the events leading up to one of the bigger finds of the day; two tons of raw explosives.

"We detained our main objective and were waiting, and then one of our sources came up and said there were caches on another guy's land further off our objective. He had already been in jail for planting [vehicle-borne explosive devices], so we and Annihilator went to his land," Jones explained.

"We just kept going, going, going, and when we got 300 meters off of his land we found these white sacks," he continued. "So we started digging these white sacks out of the ground. And working about seven feet into the ground



By Spc. Andy Miller, 122nd MPAD

Task Force 2nd Battalion, 12th Cavalry Regiment, Soldiers work with their attached Estonian counterparts to unearth a cache of armaments on farmland in the Latifiyah area of north Babil Jan. 18.

we pulled out 26 sacks."

The find, two tons of raw explosives, resulted in the first of three controlled detonations an explosive ordnance disposal team made on site that day.

"It was like a nuclear bomb to tell you the truth, the ground actually went up and then it pushed up like mushroom cloud," Jones said of the controlled detonation. "I was sitting there thinking about if that was an improvised explosive device. There would be nothing left."

After finding the cache of explosives, the Task Force Soldiers decided to conduct a more thorough sweep of the

area, consisting mostly of farmland. Capt. Andrus Meriloj, the Stone Platoon commander, explained how his troops found the buried caches using metal detectors.

"When we found the first spot it was actually easy because there were signs that something was there," Meriloj said. "Then one squad was searching in one place, and two others in different places. That's how we found caches in the different places. It was just luck, and some experience we have gained here."

Jones, who has worked with all three rotations of Estonian Soldiers who have been attached to Task Force 2-12 during the past year, said he wasn't surprised to see the Estonian troops find caches on this farmland. It was their second time searching the property, and during their first search they had found a cache as well.

"It's a tradition for Stone," Jones said. "Their first raid, they always hit the jackpot. After finding all that stuff [the first time], I knew this place was loaded."

It was loaded with two more caches of explosives and another large cache of artillery rounds, armaments and ammunition. Capt. Dave Perry, the Task Force 2-12 Cav assistant operations officer, said the Stone Platoon's attitude probably helped contribute to the amount of munitions found during the search.

"They are a first-rate organization by any standard. They're disciplined, they're brave and they are competent in what they do. They're very thorough searchers and they're good in a fight," Perry said. "So we've had at great experience working with the Estonians. They always achieve what they set out to accomplish."

Paratroopers Making Friends for the Future

By Pfc. Mike Pryor
82nd Airborne Div. Public Affairs

BAGHDAD -- When 82nd Airborne Division paratroopers prepare to enter a building in Iraq, they make sure they have bolt-cutters, plastic flexicuffs, extra ammo, and . . . pink Barbie backpacks?

That was the case when Paratroopers from C Company of the 82nd's 325th Airborne Infantry Regiment distributed more than 600 backpacks and school supply kits to students at the Al Elaf Girls Secondary School in Baghdad Jan. 15.

The company has been conducting civil-military operations in the neighborhood

the school is located in since December. In addition to carrying out raids and security patrols, the paratroopers have become actively involved with community affairs. Some of their undertakings have included interacting with the neighborhood council, re-building recreational facilities, mediating eviction disputes, overseeing trash removal, supporting the neighborhood medical clinic, and providing assistance to schools in the area.

"This is our backyard now . . . We just want to make life as comfortable as it can be for them and for us," said Sgt. Tawan Marks, a squad leader.

The paratroopers have taken a special interest in projects that directly affect the children in the neighborhood, said Capt. Adam Barlow, the company commander.

"The future of Iraq lays in the hands of the children. It's the children who will fix this country," Barlow said.

That was the reasoning behind the book bag giveaway.

It was a bright, cloudless morning when a couple of humvees and a cargo truck carrying boxes of supplies pulled up in front of the school house. As a crowd of onlookers gathered, paratroopers hopped out of the vehicles and formed a human chain to move the boxes inside.

Each box contained dozens of bright-colored backpacks emblazoned with images of cartoon characters. All the packs contained a kit with pencils, pens, rulers, and other school supplies. Once the boxes were open, the paratroopers spread out around the school distributing the backpacks.

Inside the classrooms, the girls shyly averted their eyes or giggled into their



Photos by Pfc. Mike Pryor, 82nd Airborne Div. Public Affairs

2nd Lt. Derek Reeves of Company C, 3rd Battalion, 325th Airborne Infantry Regiment, 82nd Airborne Division, hands out book bags and school supplies at the Al Elaf Girls Secondary School in Baghdad Jan. 15.

hands as the Americans in their body armor and helmets tried to squeeze between narrow rows of desks. Some mumbled a soft "Shukran (thank you)" when they received their bag.

Salaama Sood, a teacher at the school, said her students were very grateful for the backpacks. The teachers were pleased, too, she said.

"Anything that makes the students happy makes us all happy," Sood said.

After all the supplies had been distributed and the paratroopers were outside, waiting to leave, the morning calm was shattered by the sound of mortars exploding somewhere in the distance.

Staff Sgt. Christopher Fulbright had been kidding around with some local boys when the mortars struck. He watched as the frightened boys ran back inside their apartment.

The incident made Fulbright think about the future of Iraq. He hoped doing things like distributing backpacks would help ensure that, 20 years into the future, the boys he had just been playing with wouldn't be the ones firing mortars at him, Fulbright said.

"I think the best way to make sure we don't have future problems in Iraq is to win the hearts and minds of the children," he said.



1st Sgt. Timothy Guden of Company C, 3rd Battalion, 325th Airborne Infantry Regiment, 82nd Airborne Division, hands out book bags to children from the Al Wataan primary school in Baghdad.

Cav. Engineers Oversee Treatment Plant Restorations

By Sgt. John Queen
3rd BCT Public Affairs

BAGHDAD -- In an area of the world where sanitation appears to take second place to everything, engineers of the 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, have made it their priority in rebuilding and repairing Baghdad's infrastructure.

The battalion is currently helping to manage phase two of a project at the Rashid water treatment plant in the Zafaraniya district, southeast of the capital.

"During the first phase we repaired some pumps and added a backwash pump that helps clean the sand filters," said Lt. Col. Brian Dosa, commander of the 8th Engineer Battalion. "That project cost in the area of \$150,000."

The second phase, worth nearly a half million dollars, he said, is a major renovation on the plant's filter systems and the initi-

ation of new water treatment processes; primarily chlorinating the water as soon as it is pumped in from the Tigris River.

"There is a lot of algae and muck in the tank right now," Dosa said. "We're going to add this pre-chlorination to the process so it will prevent the growth of anything in the water."

Water treatment is broken down into three basic processes: coagulation and settling, filtration and disinfection.

Dosa, a resident of Newark, Del., explained that raw, untreated water is pumped in from the river and is mixed with chemicals known as coagulants. This treatment causes sticky globs called floc to form. The floc then attaches to mud and any other impurities in the water. The water is then pumped into a clarifying tank where the floc sinks to the bottom.

"The radial arms in the tank help move the particles to where they are supposed to be taken out,"



By Sgt. John Queen, 3rd BCT Public Affairs

Two Iraqi workers struggle with a high-pressure water hose as they spray away 20 years of mud and contaminants that have collected in one of the treatment plant's clarifying tanks.

Dosa said. "The water then is pumped through sand filters."

These sand filters strain the water and remove any of the remaining particles and floc. Below the filters is a grid of nozzles that help the water flow into a

holding tank under the treatment plant. It's here where the water has its final chlorine treatment and is sent out for drinking.

"This plant provides drinking water for nearly 300,000 people," Dosa said. "With these new

processes the water will be even cleaner for the people to drink."

Currently, half of the water treatment plant is shut down while these repairs and upgrades are being made, Dosa said. "We can do that because it's the winter and the demand for water is much lower."

"We'll have the repairs done before the spring and summer," he added, "before the temperature gets hot and the demand for water gets higher."

The restoration of this treatment plant is one of the many projects the 8th Engineers has going on in Zafaraniya to improve the basic services for the people that live there.

In addition to improving services, this work holds an extra bonus for residents in the area - employment. Although the 8th Engineers oversee these restoration projects, Iraqi citizens living in the local neighborhoods do the work.



Photos by Cpl. Benjamin Cossel, 122nd MPAD

Kellogg, Brown and Root employee Curtis Hoehn, a Boston, resident and bass guitar player in Last Ditch Effort, runs through a warm-up jam session prior to the band performing at the 4th Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division's New Year's Eve party.

Musicians Form Friendships, Fans at Taji

By Cpl. Benjamin Cossel
122nd MPAD

CAMP TAJI, Iraq -- It isn't money or fame that brings them together. Nor is it the lure of big lights and raucous parties. On the front lines of a combat zone, 20 miles north of the Iraqi capital, seven Soldiers have come together for one reason alone; to make rock and roll.

Since their first performance at a Soldier's recreational facility in September 2004, the seven member band, Last Ditch Effort, have gone from humble beginnings to the rock and roll force they are today.

It's the last day of 2004. The US Army's 1st Cavalry Division's Aviation Brigade, the 4th Brigade Combat Team, are holding one last party to say goodbye to the year. As headliners for the evening, Last Ditch Effort are tuning their instruments, getting their gear together. Curtis Hoehn, the bass player, starts laying down a rhythmic blues groove. The thump-de-thump-de-thump-de-thumpity-thump of the bass line stops the crowd in their tracks, heads start bobbing in time, bodies start catching the groove. Chief Warrant Officer Chad Griffin picks up his guitar and begins a melodic counter to Hoehn's driving attack. A years worth of deployment blues flow out of Griffin's Telecaster copy. Each life lost echoed in the gentle bend of a string, the year passed phrased in a slow mournful arpeggio down the neck, the crowd is hooked. Slinking behind his kit, Maj. David Toon picks up the rhythm and follows Hoehn's lead as they make for a one-two punch on the rhythm section. With a final flourish, the threesome bring the impromptu warm-up to an end, the crowd goes nuts cheering them on, but they'll have to wait.

It wasn't always this way. Six months ago if you would have said Last Ditch Effort, very few, if anyone would have known who you were talking about.

Mililani, Hawaii native Chief Warrant Officer Kimo Hansen, one of the bands founders and drummer explained, the genesis of Last Ditch Effort began back at Fort Hood.

"Chad and I were in the same troop [Troop E, 1-7 Cavalry, 4th BCT] back at West Fort Hood. We had talked a bit about our love of music and we just knew that once we got to Taji, we could get a band going. We decided we should bring our instruments along, and what we couldn't bring, we could try to buy once we got there."

"It's funny," said lead guitarist and Houston, Texas resi-



dent, Griffin, "it just sort of started out as a jam session. The usual talk of forming a band and what not, but Kimo was serious, and he had a plan."

Hansen spent much of his free time managing a praise band in the 1st Battalion (Attack) of the 227th Aviation Regiment's chapel. His close relationship with the chaplain paid off when the chaplain offered to let the fledgling group use the chapel as a practice space.

"By this time, Chad and I had got a few other Soldiers to fill out the band, we had Spc. Josh Herbert on rhythm acoustic and electric guitar, Griffin on lead, Chief Warrant Officer Cliff Mead on bass and myself on drums."

As Griffin noted, the band began keeping an eye out for singers, watching the karaoke nights that had sprung up on Friday and Saturday at the chow hall, all the while mindful on those performing in the chapel.

"We knew we had to find just the right singer," laughed Griffin, "none of us were quiet ready to take that spot and then Kimo hit me up about these two guys he had seen at the chapel."

Finishing up a praise band rehearsal one evening, Hansen stumbled upon West Palm Beach, Fla. resident, Spc. Christopher Lowry and Spc. Grant Dame of Pueblo, Col., working through a rehearsal of their own.

"Those two were just great singers and I knew Josh knew them so I asked them if they might be interested in trying out for the band. They agreed, so we set up an audition."

With a few practice sessions under their belts, the band had had the opportunity to work out some of the initial kinks of playing together. Musicians can often be a fickle bunch and knowing your band-mates and their style is almost as important as knowing your instrument.

"When Chris and Grant showed up for the audition, they hadn't had a chance to work with the band at all," explained Hansen. "We launched into 'Kryptonite' by 3 Doors Down, and man those two just nailed it on the first go round! I hadn't received my drum set from the order yet, so I sat back and listened to the guys....as soon as they finished, I offered them the job, the band unanimously agreed."

Lowry came on as the lead singer and Dame added back-up vocals and a trumpet to the mix and as they worked, the legacy grew.

"So many Soldiers have these talents that we never tap into," said Toon. "Being a part of this takes such a commitment of time, what with all the practice and shows, you really have to be dedicated to the music to be in something like this given where we are at."

"Music has turned out to be a good way to handle being out here," says Toon. "It doesn't supplement being home by any means, but it helps. These really are bonds that are forged with a love of music."

Performing at the 4th Brigade's New Year's Eve party is a mixed blessing for the members of Last Ditch Effort. The audience is primed and ready to go with various Soldiers claiming to be 'LDE groupies' but it's also the last time the band will play together in Iraq.

"Re-deployment schedules, and what have you, are going to make it difficult to put on another show before we leave," explains Hansen.

As Hansen reflects on what the future holds for Last Ditch Effort, through a sea of uncertainty, one thing is for sure.

"I'm always writing," say Halland, "Moments with You' and 'Perfect Words' are the two that we've actually put the music with the words. All of us have material we're just waiting to put together."

"We will continue this when we get home," he says. "I don't know where it'll go or what the future holds, but we are definitely going to make a go of it."

Operation Copperas Cove: Taking Weapons off the Streets

By Spc. Erik LeDrew
122nd MPAD

BAGHDAD -- In their quest to bring peace and stability to the volatile Al-Karkh district of Baghdad, Task Force 1st Battalion, 9th Cavalry Regiment (1-9 Cav.) kicked off Operation Copperas Cove the morning of Jan. 12.



Photos by Spc. Erik LeDrew, 122nd MPAD

(Above) Sgt. Brian Haiku, Spc. Jonathon Ferrer, Pfc. Aaron Gonzalez and Pfc. Dustin Hartley of Company C, 1st Battalion, 9th Cavalry Regiment, prepare to enter and search a locked shop in the Al-Karkh neighborhood of Baghdad Jan. 12, while Sgt. Andrew Busing uses bolt cutters to cut the lock. The shop was next to a mechanic's shop in which an insurgent weapon's cache was found moments earlier during Operation Copperas Cove. The owner of the shop could not be found and the local Iraqis said the owner was rarely seen.

The task force-level operation was conducted in the Al-Karkh neighborhoods of Karkh and Sheik Marruf, both of which are known for their hostility-the infamous "Haifa Street" is in this area-and are adjacent to Baghdad's International Zone.

"What I hoped to accomplish in the operation was to display our dominance of the sector, catch arms caches, and demonstrate to the Iraqi people our commitment to improving their security," said Lt. Col. Thomas MacDonald, battalion commander, Task Force 1-9 Cav., of the 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division.

The operation (named after a small town outside of Ft. Hood, Texas) was originally intended to kick-off Jan. 10, but MacDonald decided to postpone the operation two days, to coincide with an Iraqi Security Council meeting in the International Zone.

"Every time we do an operation [of this size], we reduce the [mortar and rocket] attacks against the International Zone by 90 percent," MacDonald said.

"And we reduce the attacks against our [base] as well," the Columbus, Ga. native added. "We used to get hit [here] once or twice a day, now I think we've been hit three times since the beginning of December."

The operation lasted approximately four hours and involved nearly every unit in Task Force 1-9 Cav., including several attached units, such as Company B, 3rd Battalion, 325th Airborne Infantry Regiment of the 82nd Airborne Division, and Company C, 1st Battalion, 153rd Infantry Regiment of the 39th Army National Guard Brigade out of Arkansas.

"We really had every element of the task force involved," MacDonald said. "We find that the larger the operation we do, the more successful we are in finding weapons caches."

Almost immediately after arriving in their sector for the operation, 1-9 Cavalry's Company C, "Crazy Wolf," raided a mechanic's shop suspected of being used by insurgents to store weapons and, sure enough, they found a cache.

"We found 35 mortars," said Sgt. Andrew Busing, of Co. C, 1-9 Cav.

Busing was the Soldier who checked the depression in the floor of the shop where a mechanic would stand to change a car's oil, and found several white sacks so filled-up with mortars that the sacks were too heavy to lift, forcing the Soldiers to perilously unpack the mortars one by one.

Several hours later, Crazy Wolf found a second weapons cache, this one with a little more variety than the first: ten 82mm mortars, a mortar-tube base-plate and a mortar traverse and elevation wheel. They also discovered three hand grenades, a bag of unknown synthetic material, four pounds of TNT, a roll of detonation cord and various other materials involved in the making of improvised explosive devices, such as wires and batteries.

"Charlie [Company], 1-153 found a few smaller caches as well, mainly small arms and ammunition," MacDonald said, "but nothing the size of what Charlie 1-9 [Cav.] found."

"All of the significant caches that day were found by Crazy Wolf."

MacDonald said whenever his unit conducts operations with the intent of rooting-out insurgent arms caches, it requires Soldiers to spend an extensive amount of time on the ground, which increases their chances of taking fire from the enemy. He said that's why so many units were involved in Copperas Cove.

"But that day there wasn't a shot fired," he said. "So we are making measurable gains in security [in Al-Karkh], while at the same time setting the stage for the Iraqi Security Forces to take over."

According to MacDonald, the 302nd Iraqi National Guard Battalion, the Iraqi Army unit that works with 1-9 Cav., has already began to take over certain parts of 1-9's sector.

Between the weapons caches they found and the lack of enemy contact-as well as the unusually warm reception 1-9 Cav. was given by the local Iraqis-it is difficult to argue that the mission was not a success.

"I think the mission was very successful as demonstrated by the enemy's unwillingness to engage us," MacDonald said. "He's down there and he chose to lay low that day, showing the people that they [the enemy] fear us."

(Above) Sgt. Brian Haiku, C Company, 1st Battalion, 9th Cavalry Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cav. Div., removes mortar rounds from an insurgent arms cache found in a mechanic's shop in the Al-Karkh neighborhood of Baghdad.

(Right) A local Iraqi allows Soldiers from the 1st Battalion, 9th Cavalry Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cav. Div., to search his house in the Al-Karkh district.

(Below) A Soldier with the 1st Battalion, 9th Cavalry Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cav. Div. scans the rooftop of a building in the Al-Karkh district of Baghdad.



(Above) Spc. Jonathon Ferrer, Company C, 1st Battalion, 9th Cavalry, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cav. Div., hustles down a street in central Baghdad after he and the rest of his squad dismounted their Bradley Fighting Vehicles at the start of Operation Copperas Cove.

(Left) Soldiers with the 1st Battalion, 9th Cavalry Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cav. Div., search a house in Baghdad's Al-Karkh district during Operation Copperas Cove.



Red Team

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School Supply Distribution Ends With a Bang

By Spc. Al Barrus
122nd MPAD

AL RASHID DISTRICT, Baghdad -- An Army truck pulls up to a dilapidated school where children stand in line, waiting. Troops move with a purpose, getting boxes unloaded and opened. What could be inside that's so important? Ammunition? Medical supplies?

More like pencils, notebooks and backpacks. A different kind of ammunition that proved to be just as important during a distribution at the Al Ghafari School Jan. 12 in the Arab Jabor neighborhood of the 1st Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment area of operations.

The mission started off like most any school supply distro. A civil affairs team attached to 1-8 Cav., 5th Brigade Combat Team, convoyed to the southeast region of Baghdad along the Tigris River. The team brought enough school supplies for 1,000 children.

"It was set up like a recruit's trip to the initial issue where you get a duffle bag and put everything in," joked Capt. John Morris, a civil affairs team chief in Company A, 403rd CA Battalion attached to 1-8 Cav. "We would give every kid a backpack and start stuffing in pencils and note books, crayons and glue and everything we had."

Due to finals testing, the children had been released early that day. Still, there were plenty children around the area to accept these supplies donated by family readiness groups in the United States, and backpacks

purchased locally.

"There were kids on site and school wasn't going to open up for three more weeks because of a break, so we decided to pass out bags anyway and try to have a positive effect," said Capt. Elizabeth Willett, the 5BCT education officer.

"It ended up having a great effect. Ten minutes into [it] a kid told us there was an [improvised explosive device] nearby," she said. Soldier's seemed skeptical at first, but security called for further investigation.

"I talked to the boy's father and he said 'I'm not really sure, you know how kids are, they tell stories.' I figured it may just be a story, but let's go look," said Morris, an Indianapolis native. "We saw fresh dirt where he pointed. I very gently moved the dirt of the way. You could clearly see the artillery shell."

Soon after, everyone was moved beyond a cordon around the shell where Soldiers continued giving out school supplies. An explosive ordinance disposal team showed up. With the help of a remote-controlled robot, they safely detonated the bomb. The only visible damage done was to a transformer on a power line above the blast, according to Morris.

IED's are common in Arab Jabor. This poor, rural area gives way to an unhealthy population of anti-Iraqi forces, but the particular placement of this wire-rigged, 125-millimeter artillery shell was enough to raise some eyebrows.

"We believe terrorists placed that IED there because it's been



Photos by Spc. Al Barrus, 122nd MPAD
(Above) Troopers in 1st Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment, carefully inspect a 125 millimeter artillery shell at the school during the distribution. A cordon was sealed around the bomb, where the distro continued.



(Left) Capt. Elizabeth Willett, 5th Brigade Combat Team education officer, hands a backpack full of school supplies to an Iraqi youth at the Al Ghafari School in Arab Jabour, Jan. 12.

selected as a polling site for the upcoming elections," Morris said. "The anti-Iraqi forces knew that it had that potential."

"The IED wouldn't have done much harm to the school," explained Willett, a Cheyenne, Wyo. native. "We believe it was for political motivation. There

would have been voters lined up to vote right next to it, and it would have hurt or killed quite a few of them."

Finding this roadside bomb with the help of a local child showed the civil affairs Soldiers an up-close look at the bounties of their objectives.

"It's hard for the people in this area to show their appreciation to us," said Morris. "It's easy for the AIF to bully the people here. But with what we saw at the school tells us that all the school renovations and other projects are helping to show them we are here to help."

How has this deployment made you a better person?

"I've seen a lot of things that have made me stronger. Rockets, Mortars, things like that, they tend to make you appreciate the small things."



Pfc. Gary White
Co. B, 39th Support Bn.,
1st Cav. Div.

"It's really made me appreciate home and how good we have it back in the States."



Spc. James Dawes
Troop E, 1-7 Cav.,
4th BCT, 1st Cav. Div.

"Dealing with different groups of people has improved my people skills."



Master Sgt. Davidson George
HHC, 4th BCT,
1st Cav. Div.

"I'm more appreciative of life in general and what I have at home."



Staff Sgt. Murl Alsup
HHC, 39th BCT,
1st Cav. Div.

"It's made me be more organized, I've made more goals for myself and I've matured and realize what's important in life."



Spc. Stefanie Lynch
39th BCT,
1st Cav. Div.

Spur The Moment

Photos by Cpl. Benjamin Cossel, 122nd MPAD

"Got to meet a lot of new people and made new lifelong friends."



Spc. Billy Flores
HHC,
980th Engineers

Bowie Brigade

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Have Paladin; Round Will Travel

By Cpl. Benjamin Cossel
122nd MPAD

CAMPTAJI, Iraq -- At 32 tons with the ability to fire up to four rounds per minute, the M109A6 Paladin 155mm self propelled Howitzer is the most technologically advanced canon system in the US Army's vast field artillery arsenal.

Reinforcing the 1st Battalion, 206th Field Artillery Regiment, Soldiers of the 1st Cavalry Division's Battery B, 2nd Battalion 82nd FA, maintain and operate the Paladins as one piece of the 39th Brigade Combat Team's artillery firing battery.

"This baby can be on the move, get a call to fire and be ready to respond in a matter of minutes," said Sgt. Donald Quash, an artilleryman with 2-82nd FA. "We can carry up to 32 conventional rounds, two copper head rounds [laser guided rounds] and 44 propellants, in addition to the four crew members inside every vehicle."

While mobility is a key aspect of the Paladin, the battery has found itself operating from a static gun-line as the 1st of the 206th leverages the Paladin's ability to fire over long distances. "With the ability to fire up to 30 kilometers," said Maj. Damon Cluck, operation officer, 1-206 FA, "the Paladins allow us to respond to attacks out-

side the range of our [1-206] guns."

Cluck noted, the Paladins have become a vital piece in the counter mortar/counter rocket fires that are the core of field artillery missions in Iraq.

But as Cluck explained, some of those missions are made up of the ever important registration fire, the mission that helps guarantee the accuracy of the canon systems when they do unleash their 155-millimeter brand of hellish fury.

"Any weapon system must be calibrated to ensure its accuracy," Cluck said. "Registration fire is like zeroing your rifle. By the book, anyone of us should be able to pick up anyone's rifle, set it 'battle sight zero' and fire accurately. But we know that's not exactly true, you have to take it to the range, fire it at known distances target and set the zero....that's what registration fire is all about...making sure when we fire, our guns are hitting where they are supposed to."

The eardrum shattering report of the Paladin rings out as the battery runs through one such registration fire mission. Spc. Ellery Villalobos, the ammunition team chief, stands a distance away from the vehicle, a red propellant bag slung over his shoulder. He waits. The look of excitement and sheer joy mix on his face with the dirt and grime that flies back with each round expelled. BOOOOOM fires the gun and Villalobos is sprinting



By Cpl. Benjamin Cossel, 122nd MPAD

Soldiers of the 2nd Battalion, 82nd Field Artillery Regiment have been assigned duty to Camp Taji, reinforcing the 1st of the 20th FA, 39th Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division.

towards it with a new round to load up.

All told, the team will fire 10 rounds, two for adjustment, eight for effect. The impacts are monitored and relayed back to the fire direction center by an observation team stationed at the range. As the mission comes to a close, 2nd Lt. Bryan Shipman, fire direction officer, Battery B, 1st-206th walks out to congratulate the Soldiers for such an impressive shoot.

"Only two rounds for adjustment and all eight of the rounds for effect where within ten meters of each other," the lieutenant tells

them. "That's just awesome guys, great shooting."

The augmentation of the Paladins has also proven beneficial to Artillery Soldiers of the 1st of the 206th. The paladins and M102 Howitzers share the same fire direction center, the computer nerve center of the gun-line.

"Many of Soldiers had no previous experience operating the computer systems used by the Paladins," explained Cluck. "As we work together to accomplish the mission, they've had to learn how to use them and can now add that to their knowledge base."

Having completed their registration fire, the team of Soldiers is conducting an informal After Action Review; what could have been better, what went bad and what they can improve. Sgt. Richard Castro, of Fresno, Calif., notes the shoot was supposed to include 20 rounds, but for reasons unspecified called short at ten.

"That's OK," Castro exclaimed as he rinses the accumulated dirt from his face. "[That] just means we'll have to do it again sometime soon and there isn't any job better in the Army than this one right here!"

Engineers Mark Their Territory in Concrete

By Pfc. Katrina Tucker
39th BCT Public Affairs

CAMP TAJI, Iraq -- A bright red flag extends into the air between two towers that frame the entryway of the gray concrete structure. Inside this doorway, on a small plaque an inscription reads: 239th Engineers, 39th Brigade Combat Team, Arkansas Army National Guard, Operation Iraqi Freedom II, March 2004-2005, Isaiah 6:8.

Replicas of this prominent symbol for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the turreted castle, can be viewed around the world. The 239th recently added Taji, Iraq to that list.

The original home of the castle, which can now be seen safeguarding the entryway to the 239th's headquarters, was Baghdad Island. Iraqi craftsmen built the castle for a previous engineer brigade.

"While we were on a mission, the commander expressed an interest in the castle, so I went out there to see what it would take to move it," said 1st Lt. Rusty Fontenot, 3rd platoon leader.

Therein began the mission of transporting the castle from the island to its new home. The 24-year-old from Bay, Ark., was instrumental in the process of relocating the con-



By Pfc. Katrina Tucker, 39th BCT Public Affairs

The symbol of the engineers stands prominently in front of the headquarters building at Camp Taji, Iraq. The concrete structure was originally built by Iraqis on Baghdad Island, but was moved to Camp Taji as part of the preparation to reopen the amusement park to the public.

crete structure.

Soldiers from the 239th took on the task of dismantling the castle in order to move it. The concrete mixture used on the structure was not very strong and some pieces of the castle were broken when the Soldiers were dismantling the joints, said Sgt. Ronald Hays, 29, of Clarksville, Ark. After the castle had

been separated, the Soldiers used various vehicles to bring the pieces to Taji.

Now, it was time to reconstruct the symbolic fortress. Everything was in pieces so the Soldiers had to work off of the original pictures, said Spc. Charles Brownlee, a member of 3rd platoon. Brownlee, a concrete finisher from Ozark, Ark., was involved in reassem-

bling the castle.

Over a seven-day period, a variety of Soldiers from each platoon began bringing the structure back to life. The Soldiers had a good time; it was something to do besides the everyday routine, said Brownlee. The finished product, some 13 feet long and five feet tall, is fashioned completely out of concrete.

The hands of the 239th Engineers mixed all of the concrete used in rebuilding the castle. Materials were hard to come by, so the Soldiers had to use whatever they could find to transport the concrete to the reconstruction site.

It was almost a 'stone-age' effort, said Sgt. John Carney, a member of the 239th's support platoon. The Soldiers used shovels and a mop bucket to carry the concrete.

It was a challenge, but the Soldiers worked really hard, said Carney. Whether transporting the castle from the island or reconstructing it here, each platoon had a hand in some part of the project.

The Corps of Engineers adopted the emblem in since 1902. The 239th has shown their allegiance through rebuilding the replica of this turreted castle. The castle is a picture of pride to all engineers. This is a way for the 239th to leave a mark, said Carney.

Medic Ignores Pain, Saves Lives

By Pfc. Matthew McLaughlin
10th Mtn. Div. Public Affairs

CAMP LIBERTY, Baghdad -- Some say adversity is the true test of someone's mettle. Courage under fire, regardless of rank, position or job is not just a test of knowledge but of character. One Soldier took the test and passed with flying colors.

Pfc. Joshua Thielen, a medic with 2nd Battalion, 14th Infantry Regiment, 10th Mountain Division, was awarded the Combat Medic Badge and the Purple Heart Medal for treating a wounded Soldier while sustaining his own injuries Nov. 13.

Thielen and Soldiers from 2-14 Inf. were escorting an explosive ordinance detachment to a suspected improvised explosive device along Route Irish, a notoriously dangerous road between the International Zone and Camp Victory. An Iraqi vehicle approached the convoy and attempted to ram the humvee in the side.

"I saw a green Cutlass stop short and the next thing I know, he tried to t-bone us," said Staff Sgt. Ernest Parlin, a platoon sergeant with 2-14 Inf. who shared a humvee with Thielen.

Parlin had his gunner fire on the vehicle while his driver attempted evasive action. The vehicle rear-ended the humvee. Thielen said he could not see the attack from his seat.

"He hit us and I heard him rev his engine up" Thielen, a Kalamazoo, Mich. native said. "A big fireball engulfed the humvee. It was intense. There was smoke and debris everywhere. Nothing was left of the car."

"I saw a black flash and metal and body parts," Parlin said. "The trees were on fire. The (.50 caliber machine gun) was blown completely off the truck. We crawled out of the truck."

When Thielen finally got out, he said his ankle felt odd but he was running on adrenaline and was not in pain. He began to check on his fellow Soldiers. Thanks to the uparmored humvee, most of the Soldiers were not seriously injured. The gunner, however, was badly wounded, Parlin said. The .50 caliber machine gun was blown off by the blast and hit the gunner in the face.

"All we could see was blood and two eyes," Parlin said. "His jaw was completely busted and he had shrapnel wounds on his face."

Parlin said the situation would have been a lot worse if it weren't for Thielen and other Soldiers' grace under pressure.

"I take my hat off to everybody there," he said. "They grew up quickly. Lots of people were on it that day. Doc Thielen was probably the coolest. He didn't even worry about himself. He did an awesome job. If Doc Thielen wasn't there, I don't like to think worst case scenario, but (the gunner) probably would have died."

Thielen quickly aided his friend and applied pressure dressings to the wound. With a head wound, it is important for the victim to remain conscious, Thielen said.

"I made sure he was coherent. He wanted to pass out, but I made him stay conscious," he said. "It could've been a lot worse. I'm amazed he didn't lose consciousness. It would have been more compromising if he did."



By Pfc. Matthew McLaughlin, 10th Mtn. Div. Public Affairs

Pfc. Joshua Thielen, 2nd Battalion, 14th Infantry Regiment, checks a fellow Soldier's throat. Thielen was awarded the Purple Heart Medal and Combat Medic Badge for treating a Soldier while ignoring his own wound Nov. 13.

The Soldiers called for a medical evacuation and continued to treat the wounded Soldier. As time passed, Thielen's ankle began to hurt. Only after the injured Soldier was stabilized did Thielen tend to his own wounds.

"When the adrenaline wore off, it started to hurt when I walked," he said. "I said there was something wrong with my ankle. A couple days later, they said I had a fractured ankle."

The vehicle borne improvised explosive device wasn't the end of the 2-14th Inf. Soldiers' problems. After Thielen was treated and the wounded Soldier was loaded onto a vehicle, mortars reigned on the Soldiers.

"Once the medevac came in, the mortar rounds came in hard," Parlin said. "We had another casualty from the other unit, and then we got into a fire fight."

The Soldiers eventually escaped the situation without any more casualties. The wounded Soldier is currently recuperating at Walter Reed Medical Center and is in "high spirits" according to Parlin. Thielen is recovering from a fractured ankle and is eager to rejoin his fellow Soldiers in combat patrols. Until then, he is content to help Soldiers on Camp Liberty. He said he takes pride in what he does, but dismisses any notion that he is a hero.

"I heard people say 'hero,' but I'm just doing my job," he said. "Whether someone has a cold or is injured, I take care of them."

Parlin said he and his fellow infantry Soldiers are glad to have Thielen on their side. Although he is a medic in an infantry unit, Parlin said he is one of the team and not an outsider. He has more than proven his courage in the face of danger.

"You see the way a person responds under fire. You see from their reaction whether you want to be with that person or not. Every time we go out, we want to have him with us."

Signal Co. Tallies Millionth Call

By Spc. Brian Schroeder
10th Mtn. Div. Public Affairs

CAMP LIBERTY, Baghdad -- Since invading Iraq, coalition forces have reached several milestones: removing Saddam Hussein from power, preparing for the country's first democratic elections later this month and B Company, 10th Signal Battalion, 10th Mountain Division recording their one millionth completed call.

An overwhelming number of calls made from digital non-secure voice telephones has brought the number of completed calls past 1 million for the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division. It is the job of Soldiers from B Company, 10th Signal Battalion to process these calls and maintain the telephone systems to ensure messages can be transmitted throughout the brigade.

"On a daily basis we process 10,000 calls," said Sgt. Lee Frost, network switching operator. "We have had a 99 percent completion rate of calls so far."

Frost said the volume of calls for the 2nd BCT has been a surprise. He estimated the node center will process between 400 and 500 calls during a four hour period.

"We are actually processing a lot more calls than I thought we would," he said. "What we process in a four hour

block here is what we would process back at Fort Drum in one day."

When a Soldier from the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division picks up a DNVF and dials his desired extension, the call goes to one of nine small node extensions B Company, 10th Signal Battalion maintains throughout Baghdad. At this location, the extension node immediately checks its database to see if the number exists.

Once confirmed, the call goes through a switchboard to the main node center via radio signals. Capt. Daniel Snowdall, B Company, 10th Signal Battalion commander said the node center is the main hub for all calls made by the brigade.

"The node centers are the ones who make this happen," he said. "The node center will do a search to find the location of the number you are calling and will direct it there. Once the person on the other end picks up their receiver, the call is complete."

Though a minor milestone in comparison to the overall mission for coalition forces in Iraq, Snowdall said processing 1 million phone calls in five months is quite an accomplishment for his company.

"We are the AT&T, Verizon and Southwestern Bell for the brigade, and we do it 24/7," he said.

10th Mtn. Div. Welcomes New Digs

By Spc. Brian Schroeder
10th Mtn. Div. Public Affairs

CAMP LIBERTY, Baghdad -- The 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division command and staff officially relocated to a new tactical operations center Jan. 8.

The new structure is a drastic change from the two desert colored tents that housed the tactical operations center (TOC) and the administrative logistics operations center. The dusty tents offered little cover from the elements because of open seams and holes in the roof that leaked when it rained. The new building



By Spc. Brian Schroeder, 10th Mtn. Div. Public Affairs

Pfc. Luis Flynn, 30th Engineering Battalion attached to the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division carries a box of office supplies to the Commando's new tactical operations center on Camp Liberty

has wooden walls, windows and a roof to protect the TOC from the Iraqi weather.

Several of the inhabitants of the office are pleased with the new building, including 1st Lt. Eric Rose, 2nd BCT plans officer.

The majority of the sections within the TOC have their own individual office. The old office had six foot partitions separating each individual shop and an open ceiling. The open air environment allowed for easy conversations between the different shops said WO1 Shawn Lashbrook, assistant logistics officer.

"I miss the office camaraderie," Lashbrook said. "It was nice to talk to the shops next to you without having to leave your office. However it is nice having everybody under one roof."

Each office in the new TOC has new office furniture, which is a drastic change from the mismatched, second-hand furniture in the tents. Other improvements with the new building include climate controlled wall units for each office and a conference room that is twice the size of the old one.

Maj. John Aita, 2nd BCT brigade surgeon said the new TOC has more of a professional feel than the former tents. He said all of the new additions are great, but there are small things he misses from the old office.

"I haven't seen any coffee makers in the new building," he said. "I miss knowing where the coffee is."

Tiger Brigade

Feb. 5, 2005

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Louisiana State TAG Visits Tiger Brigade

By Spc. Erin Robicheaux
256th BCT Public Affairs

CAMPLIBERTY, Baghdad - Louisiana's Adjutant General, Maj. Gen. Bennett Landreneau and Command Sgt. Maj. John Morrow, senior enlisted advisor for the state of Louisiana, paid a visit to Brig. Gen. John Basilica, Jr. and his Soldiers of the 256th Brigade Combat Team (BCT). The purpose of the event was to get a hands-on picture of the hard work that the Tiger Brigade has been doing since arriving in Baghdad.

The distinguished guests began their visit at Camp "Tigerland," the brigade's portion of Camp Liberty, by taking the grand tour with Basilica as their guide. They were shown the "hot spots," such as the morale, welfare and recreation center, the gym, "Tiger Plaza," as well as the new chapel and the Onward-Shondee Troop Medical Clinic.

To continue, they spent the day with troops from 1st Battalion, 141st Field Artillery (FA) Regiment. After having lunch and a short briefing by Lt. Col. Jordan Jones, Commander of the 1-141, Landreneau and Morrow were taken to the M109 A6 Paladin firing position and able to meet the Soldiers who make it all happen.

He was so excited as a result of his tour inside the Howitzer that when he emerged he exclaimed, "I almost shot that thing!"

Following this earth shaking experience, the visitors circled the perimeter of Tigerland to meet the Soldiers standing guard from their towers, then headed to the Brigade Interrogation Facility

(BIF), where the 1-141 has been gathering intelligence from detainees to focus the mission of the 256th.

Maj. Darren Ledet, of Baton Rouge, La. is the human intelligence coordinator for the facility. He oversees the collection of intelligence gathered for the brigade. Ledet also ensures that everything is in order so that the process of determining innocence or guilt of a detainee is smooth.

"We see this through all the way up to the court system," he explained to Landreneau and Morrow. "That's why it's essential to have a complete packet on the person from the patrol on up."

At the end of the day, Landreneau noted his pride in the Soldiers of the 256th BCT.

"I'm just overwhelmed by the professionalism of the 256th Brigade," he said. "Everywhere I've been the Soldiers seem so focused, so dedicated, so committed to doing the mission."

The following day was spent with various units of the Tiger Brigade, beginning with the 1st Battalion, 156th Armor Regiment. After breakfast with the troops and receiving a briefing by Lt. Col. Thomas Plunkett, commander of the 1-156th, Landreneau and Morrow went to Geronimo's Motor Pool to get a firsthand view of what the troops have been working on.

They were escorted by Master Sgt. Billy Myers from Natchitoches, La., Battalion Maintenance Technician for 1-156th. As part of his tour, he introduced them to Sgt. 1st Class David Shaw, from Rosepine, La. Shaw exhibited a project that he and some of his fellow Soldiers have been working on. They



Photos by Spc. Erin Robicheaux, 256th BCT Public Affairs

After eating dinner with Soldiers from the 1088th Engineer Battalion, Maj. Gen. Bennett Landreneau cuts the cake with the help of Brig. Gen. John Basilica, Jr. and Lt. Col. Lee Hopkins, commander of the 1088th.

designed a kit to go in back of an up-armored humvee that provides for extra protection for the Soldiers when they go out on missions.

After bidding farewell to the Soldiers of Task Force Geronimo, Landreneau and Morrow spent time with the Soldiers of Task Force Steel. The 2nd Battalion, 156th Infantry Regiment troops appeared thrilled by the visit. They showed their guests around the motor pool and as they were having lunch together, they presented them with a gift to take back home to Louisiana.

Upon arriving in Baghdad, both the Maj. Gen. and Command Sgt. Maj. lost their luggage, and though showed up in the end, the Soldiers of 2nd Battalion felt it in their hearts to give the visitors a gift; an outfit more fitting for their new environment. As Command Sgt. Maj. Homer Stelly, the battalion's senior noncommissioned officer explained to everyone, "We thought that you could hang this in your office back home."

They were presented with an authentic Iraqi headdress and robe, complete with the patch of the 256th Brigade on the sleeve. The Louisiana leadership was genuinely touched by the sentiment, and was all smiles after viewing their gifts.

Next they were whisked away by the logistical masterminds of the Tiger Brigade, the 199th Forward Support Battalion (FSB). Lt. Col. James Waskom, commander for 199th FSB, not only brought them around to meet troops, but they also participated in an awards ceremony for

four of their Soldiers.

Landreneau awarded each with their respective honor and thanked them for their service to the people of Iraq, as well as to the citizens of the United States. The recipients were as follows: Chief Warrant Officer Parnell Sumbler from Alexandria, La. Army Commendation Medal (ARCOM); Sgt. Bryant White from Shreveport, La., ARCOM; Sgt. John Beeson from Alexandria, La., Army Achievement Medal (AAM); and Spc. Harold Baylor from Alexandria, La., AAM.

Perhaps the highlight of their day, though, was the retention ceremony held in the Tiger Den Dining Facility. Along with special guest, U.S. Senator Mary Landrieu (D-La.), Landreneau and Basilica facilitated the ceremony. Over 70 of the 104 Soldiers who extended their service raised their right hands and took an oath of extension.

Landrieu was part of the Congressional Delegation, which consisted of senators from several states. They came to Baghdad to meet with local leaders and to have dinner and conversation with Soldiers from their states.

Landrieu expressed her pride for the troops of Louisiana.

"It's so impressive, that these brave men and women would raise their hand and sign up for (up to) six more years," she said. "It's going to be tough, it may even get harder before we win, but ultimately freedom and democracy will prevail and it will be a great gift to the world."

The senator also expressed her sorrow of the Soldiers that the

brigade has lost since arriving into Baghdad.

"Our hearts and gratitude go out to the families for what they've given in support of this operation," she said.

When the news of the most recent attacks that killed seven members of the Tiger Brigade came in, Landreneau and Morrow rushed to the sides of the friends of the fallen Soldiers. Morrow explained that as his heart was feeling the pain of the accident, he also knew that he had to be tough for his guys.

"I felt such a deep loss. I felt like I needed to be there," he said, "but at the same time I knew that I had to keep strong, keep the leadership going so that they (the Soldiers) can move out to do their missions."

Morrow said that he couldn't really describe what he was feeling that night.

"It's a tremendous loss felt and I really don't even have the words to put forth on this," he said. "But the sun's going to come up in the morning and we've got to be ready for it."

Along with the sorrow also comes pride in their Soldiers, and as Landreneau said, they couldn't be more proud of the job that the 256th has done thus far.

"I'd have to say that the determination and dedication stands out most," he said. "Whether you're in the motor pool watching the mechanics do the marvelous work and getting equipment back up, or you're watching teams as they prepare to go out on their missions, it's all about the professionalism of the Tiger Soldier."



Command Sergeants Major Homer Stelly, 2nd Battalion, 156th Infantry Regiment, James Mays, 256th Brigade Combat Team, John Morrow, Louisiana senior enlisted advisor and Gary Ermantinger, 3rd Battalion, 156th Infantry Regiment, enjoy a relaxing moment in the "Steel Bullethole," a combined morale, welfare and recreation center for 2-156th and 199th Forward Support Battalion.



By Sgt. Dan Purcell, 122nd MPAD

Audience members listen to a song performed by the Tigerland Gospel Choir during a Martin Luther King, Jr. birthday celebration held at Camp Liberty Jan. 17. The 1st Cavalry Division's Equal Opportunity office sponsored the event to commemorate the life of Dr. King.

First Team Troopers Continue the 'Dream'

By Sgt. Dan Purcell
122nd MPAD

CAMP LIBERTY, Baghdad -- Soldiers of the 1st Cavalry Division gathered at a Morale, Welfare and Recreation center here to celebrate Martin Luther Kings' birthday on Jan. 17.

The event was sponsored by the division's Equal Opportunity (EO) office and included a cast of volunteers and a variety of entertainment commemorating the life of Dr. King.

According to Sgt. 1st Class Verdell Brown, the program's noncommissioned officer in charge, the event took three weeks of planning and prepara-

tion.

"I put my same best foot forward here as I would have back home, because it's important to teach people that Martin Luther King stood for something more than just a day off," Brown said.

Some of the celebration highlights included an inspirational dance, a question and answer game that tested the audiences' knowledge of Dr. King's life, and music provided by the Tigerland Gospel Choir.

"I think it's remarkable that we can still celebrate this type of event in a combat zone," said the division's EO officer. "It's good for morale because it adds to the humanity factor here."

Educational Opportunities Available to Baghdad Troops

By Staff Sgt. Susan German
122nd MPAD

CAMP LIBERTY, Baghdad -- Soldiers wishing to develop themselves professionally while deployed to Iraq now have a new alternative using a program designed to provide faster access to the Army's online education system.

The system accesses the same e-Learning program currently available on AKO (Army Knowledge Online) but required a new server be brought on board in order to provide a level of connectivity similar to that AKO users in the states are accustomed to.

Before his deployment to Iraq, Capt. Tracy Dancer, from Fort Scott, Kan., site administrator and commander of Detachment B, 15th Personnel Services Battalion, 1st Cavalry Division, noticed that there was a lack of emphasis on education, although avenues existed for Soldiers to further their education. Back in the states there are numerous online education opportunities, including the e-Learning program on AKO.

"In the streamlined army that we're in now, standing up a total of 53 brigades, the mission is bigger, the units are smaller, the people have to be brighter, sharper, more flexible and more adaptive," Dancer said. "You can't work fewer people harder and get the mission done. You have to work them smarter, so education is of real importance."

Once Dancer arrived in country, he worked with Skillsoft software engineers in the states to obtain the software package necessary to allow Soldiers in theater to access the SkillPort e-Learning site. Prior to that, trying to access the AKO education site was difficult, the downloading of college courses could take eight to ten hours, if the system didn't time out first. After four or five rebuilds, which meant taking the system down to its original settings and reloading everything from start to finish, the system is

officially up and available to Soldiers and civilians of the 1st Cav. Div. community.

"We have Burger King, and they're talking about a Taco Bell, and we have Subway and Pizza Hut, but no education center and no emphasis on education," Dancer said. "I knew that selling the site would be an easy sell if only because it would be the only education site within theater."

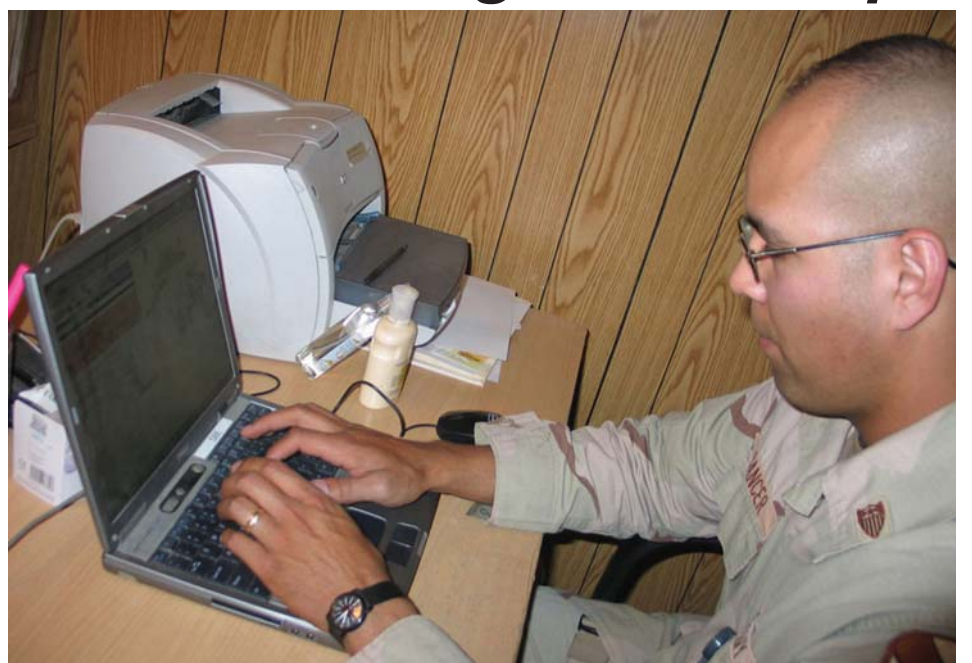
He began work on the project while he was working as a systems automation officer at MNC-I (Multi-National Corps - Iraq) and gives fellow workers there much credit for their help with bringing the program online. He has continued his work improving the system even since assuming command of his detachment in November.

"I jokingly say it was a lot of hard work, which it was, but it truly was a labor of love," Dancer said.

Initial registration on the ATRRS (the Army Training Requirements and Resources System) site (<https://www.atrrs.army.mil>) is required so that a record is established for each student and course completion certificates can be generated. Once a student has registered, he can also access the site directly at <http://usarmy.skillport.com>.

There are over 1,300 courses available online, covering a variety of subjects, such as communication, finance, human resources and customer service. Similar to the Army Correspondence Course program, course completion notices can be submitted for promotion points, where five course hours are equivalent to one promotion point. Courses are free of charge when they are used for promotion points.

Students can also submit their credits earned for evaluation by several academic partners, including the University of Phoenix, Drexel University, Northcentral Technical College and Strayer University, for possible credit toward an undergraduate degree. (Credit fees vary and are available by accessing the individual school sites).



By Staff Sgt. Susan German, 122nd MPAD

Fort Scott, Kan. native Capt. Tracy Dancer, commander of Detachment B, 15th Personnel Services Battalion, 1st Cavalry Division, and site administrator for the theater-based online education site, logs on to the SkillPort online education site.

There are currently 279 participating users and 602 activated users. Authorized users include Department of the Army Active Duty, Reserve and National Guard Soldiers as well as DA civilian employees. The current system is available to MNC-I, MNF-I (Multi-National Forces - Iraq) and 1st Cav. Soldiers.

A self-proclaimed computer geek and adjutant general branch officer, Dancer has been playing with computers for the last 22 years, from Apples to Commodores to the present level of computers.

Dancer continues to perform site administration duties, including the uploading of new courses and updating of student records even as he winds down his deployment and plans to maintain the site from his "remote" location back in the states.

And what does a computer geek do to relieve stress? Every Saturday night Dancer

visits his friends back at his old office at MNC-I for "gaming night," where he hosts a game server and they spend three to four hours relieving their stress by playing computer games.

While coming on late in this deployment for 1st Cav. Div. Soldiers, the program will remain resident in Baghdad, according to Lt. Col. Colin Hood, commander of the 15th PSB.

"That's been our approach, we have continued to improve our foxhole with every opportunity and we haven't stopped," Hood said. "We're going to continue to improve, right up until the time the 3rd Infantry Division arrives because we want to make the transition as smooth as possible and we want to reduce the number of headaches for the next team coming in, so they can focus on taking care of the Soldiers."

In Recognition

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Silenced Singer Honored by 10th Mtn. Soldiers

By Sgt. Antonieta Rico
10th Mtn. Div. Public
Affairs

CAMP LIBERTY, Baghdad -- A five-person choir lifted their voices to the mournful notes of "Amazing Grace" Jan. 7 in a small section of Camp Al-Nasr. The choir performed during a memorial service to honor a fallen comrade. The voice of the fifth member of the choir, Spc. Jeff LeBrun, was missing, however. Instead LeBrun's M16, Kevlar, dog-tags and boots were mute participants in the harmony.

LeBrun's singing was forever silenced Jan. 1st when an improvised explosive device went off near his vehicle during a security escort with C Battery, 2nd Battalion, 15th Field Artillery Regiment.

To most Americans LeBrun, who was born in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, but was raised in Brooklyn, N.Y., is another number to add to the list of those killed in action, to his fellow Soldiers at 2-15th, that number has a name; Jeff.

To most Americans LeBrun is another faceless hero, to his fellow Soldiers, that hero always wore a smile on his face.

To Pfc. Derek Jent, LeBrun was the only choice for best man at his wedding.

"He always supported me no matter what I was doing," Jent



Photos by Sgt. Antonieta Rico, 10th Mtn. Div. Public Affairs

(Above) Originally a five-person choir formed by Soldiers of 2nd Battalion, 15th Field Artillery Regiment, four remaining members perform at the memorial service for their fifth member, Spc. Jeff LeBrun. LeBrun was killed Jan. 1st when an improvised explosive device detonated near the Humvee he was riding on.

(Right) Spc. Kevin Vaughn holds LeBrun's dog tags during a memorial ceremony Jan. 7 at Camp Liberty.

said. "He was the person to have your back."

LeBrun had a joy of life he shared with his fellow Soldiers.

"From the time I met him he was always smiling," Jent said, "Everyone knew where he was when he was there."

"He made people smile because he was always dancing around like Usher," said Spc. Kevin Vaughn, an Army buddy of LeBrun.

He also had the vocal chords to go with the dancing.

"He had the voice of an angel," Vaughn said. "He put a

smile in everybody's face."

When LeBrun had some free time he would sing Karaoke at the Morale and Welfare tent here at (Camp Liberty) or talk to his family in the internet café and download music, Jent said.

LeBrun was looking forward to seeing his family and was planning on buying a car when he returned to the states.

"He was ready to get serious with a girl back home," Vaughn said

Vaughn reflected on the fact that people in the states are detached from the effects of a war



they only see on TV.

Vaughn stares blindly off to the distance for a while, looking inwardly, "It's not a joke," he says finally, "It's real out here. It's real. At any given moment someone could just go down."

But although LeBrun is one of those who went down, his memory won't go down with him.

"He is inside of us at all times," Jent said.

"Everything he did had music to it."



Photos by Staff Sgt. Susan German, 122nd MPAD

(Above) A detail consisting of Soldiers from the Scout Platoon of the 1st Battalion, 161st Infantry Regiment, prepare to fire a 21-gun salute to conclude the memorial ceremony for Sgt. Damien Ficek at Camp Prosperity Jan. 4.

(Left) Part of Ficek's protective vest, adorned with the badges and patches depicting his military career, lay on display during the ceremony.

(Right) An Iraqi National Guard soldier offers his prayers at a memorial display during Ficek's memorial.



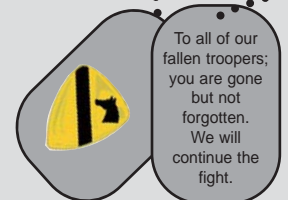
Our Fallen Troops.

Pfc. Alain Kamolvathin

Pfc. Francis Obaji

Capt. Christopher Sullivan

Sgt. Brett Swank



'Oscar' Bowl: 77th Nominees Praised, Panned

Just like the Super bowl is the culmination of a year's worth of football, the Academy Awards (or "Oscars," your choice) is the culmination of a year's worth of movies—even if the winners are usually a reflection of what is the most popular movie, not necessarily "the best" movie.

When the 77th Academy Award nominations were announced Jan. 25, legendary director Martin Scorsese's well-received Howard Hughes biopic *The Aviator*—starring Leonardo DiCaprio as the reclusive billionaire—came out on top with 11 nominations including Best Picture, Director and Actor; as well as Supporting Actor and Actress, Original Screenplay, and a slew of technical award nominations.

The next closest was Clint Eastwood's *Million Dollar Baby* with seven nominations, including those for Best Picture, Director for Eastwood, Actor for Eastwood, Actress for Hilary Swank and Supporting Actor for Morgan Freeman. The film also managed to score a Best Editing nomination and a Best Adapted Screenplay nomination.

And coming in third was, inexplicably, *Ray*, the Ray Charles biopic that according to general

LeDrew's Reviews

SPC Erik LeDrew



Movie Critic

consensus among audiences and critics, is so good only because of Jamie Foxx's uncanny portrayal (some would say "impersonation") of the late musician. And certainly not because of Taylor Hackford's so-so directing (although *The Devil's Advocate* is pretty underrated and the finale of *Proof of Life* is a fine piece of action filmmaking, the guy has never been a very strong director) for which the film was also nominated, nor it's costume design.

While on the topic of Jamie Foxx, if the awards show will be anybody's night, it'll be his, simply due to the dual Best Actor-Best Supporting Actor (for *Collateral*) nominations the guy managed to pull off. Personally, if you had told me a year ago that Foxx would not only prove himself to be a good actor in 2004, but that he would be nominated for not one, but two Oscars for it, I just would have

smiled and nodded and called the nuthouse people.

With a four nomination lead, *The Aviator* would appear to be the logical shoo-in for an awards sweeper come Feb. 27, but amidst strong reviews support is rapidly growing for Clint Eastwood's down-to-earth boxing flick *Million Dollar Baby*, and many of the folks in the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences may be feeling a bit sorry for old Clint after *Mystic River* got bludgeoned by last year's awards juggernaut, *The Return of the King*, which swept awards in all of the categories it was nominated in.

Since none of the other Best Picture nominees are anywhere near either *The Aviator* or *Million Dollar Baby* in terms of critical and commercial success, expect the race to be solely between those two.

Likewise for Best Director, although Martin Scorsese seems to be suffering the *Stanley Kubrick Curse* which means that he's regarded as arguably the greatest living filmmaker and has not yet won a single Academy Award (although he has been nominated for several).

When you think Scorsese, you think *Goodfellas*, *Taxi Driver*, *Raging Bull*, *Mean Streets*—some of



the greatest films ever made—and yet the guy will likely lose to Clint Eastwood (who is a very good filmmaker, but not quite "great") simply because Clint's movie is the senti-

mental favorite to win. And that's a shame.

Scorsese's probably just too damn good to win an Oscar. Like Kubrick.

Super Bowl Prediction? Might as Well Flip a Coin!

A funny thing happened on the way to Fallujah: as I hung out with Task Force 2-7 Cavalry, the sports column went unwritten. Oops.

After a two-and-a-half month hiatus and a change in the editorial staff, I decided to bring back one last sports column, a review of the year, of sorts, in sports.

If you followed this column over the course of our year in Baghdad, you will know that I don't know how to pick a winner in the National Football League. I ended up with a 58 percent accuracy rate, up until the column went into hibernation in mid-November. The Kansas City Chiefs and the Green Bay Packers were my favorites to make it to the final showdown.

Next season, I think I'll just a flip a coin.

At the time of this writing, the two teams headed to Super Bowl XXXIX just fought their way in. Donovan McNabb and his Philadelphia Eagles broke a three-year losing streak in the NFC Championship. Over in the AFC, the New England Patriots have some sports writers already using the term "dynasty," as they head to their third Super Bowl in four years.

Trigger Pull

MSG Dave Larsen



Sports Buff

And the winner is...

If you're a betting fan, I'd go in the opposite direction of this pick: the Eagles will win it all. Yeah, even without Terrell Owens.

Both the Patriots and the Eagles are great football teams. Corey Dillon makes New England even better than they were a year ago. Both teams pride themselves on the ability to run the ball, and to stop the run. Big plays in the passing game and special teams will mean the difference in the NFL's finale Feb. 6.

Though Tom Brady is a winner, Donovan McNabb is a better quarterback. I look for McNabb to have a big game, through the air and on the ground (running away from blitzes), but I think Brian Westbrook will be the MVP of the game. I expect the Eagles to use



Graphic by Spc. Marie Whitney, 122nd MPAD

him extensively in the big game. New England has no one on their roster that can cover him.

Final score: Eagles 27, Patriots 24.

Highlights of 2004

With not much time to watch television over here, let alone sit down for three hours at a crack to watch a sporting event, many of us relied on the internet to get our sporting information.

We missed a lot of cool stuff this year, too!

The Summer Olympics in Athens: like the unbeaten Women's Softball Team. Go USA!

Lowlights of 2004

The USA Men's Olympic Basketball Team: enough said.

The NBA Brawl at the Palace: Ron Artest clocks a fan courtside. It set off cash register bells in my head. Cha-Ching! (Can you say lawsuit? I knew you could).

In baseball: steroids. (Barry Bonds is still the best baseball player, ever, to have taken performance-enhancing drugs).

Transition

We'll all be here in Baghdad for Super Bowl Sunday. Most of us will miss the game. A year without live sporting events, to some, was like a year without sunshine.

One of the biggest changes in every sports fan's life this spring will be the availability of so much more sports - live and on the boob tube. As we filter back to our homes, spring training will be firing up and March Madness will be in full swing. And we'll on hand to take it all in!

I'm hoping my wife understands the need for me to prop myself up on the couch at times, when I get back home, with remote and salsa bowl in hand.

Pass the chips, will ya?